CHAPTER 16
Killing a Nation

In August 1945 the atom bomb was simply fitted into a long, secret pattern of war making by the massacre of civilians. The atomic attacks *seemed* to vindicate that pattern by the sudden ending of the war against Japan that followed almost immediately and which, so far as the public and troops knew (in ignorance of our secret intercepts of Japanese communications), had no other way of being achieved. The military service that delivered the bomb had no trouble, after all, winning its independence from the other services soon after the war, and no great resistance to accepting its own subsequent domination by the Strategic Air Command, built up and commanded in turn by Generals Curtis LeMay and Thomas Power, an organization which was committed to the tactics of extermination perfected in the last six months of World War II.

But against what adversary was it now directed? As World War II came to an end, only one country was left with the population, armed forces, and industrial and scientific strength to challenge the United States militarily: the Soviet Union—despite having suffered virtually unprecedented wartime destruction and casualties. Moreover, it was ruled by a dictator as ruthless as Hitler and by a single party more cohesive and competent than the Nazi Party; it already occupied half of Europe and had the military strength to take over the other half. Increasingly, and with various underlying motives,